

HORTICULTURE

for the home gardener

County of Los Angeles Department of Arboreta and Botanic Gardens

CYMBIDIUMS AND PAPHIOPEDILUM ORCHIDS



Cymbidium and paphiopedilum orchids are relatively easy to grow in your home or in most outdoor areas where freezing temperatures are not encountered. These orchids are native to tropical mountainous southeast Asia, at elevations up to 8,000 feet, where nights are cool and rainfall is from 50 to 100 inches per year. They grow as terrestrials in an accumulation of loose, decaying vegetation on ledges partially shaded by overhanging cliffs or trees.

LIGHT AND TEMPERATURE

Paphios and cymbidiums do best in daytime temperatures of between 70° - 60°F. and in nighttime temperatures of 50° - 60°F. If plants are to be situated in outside areas, where the temperature drops below 32°F. with moderate frost, plants can be protected with a cover of polyethylene film in the winter. In colder areas orchids should be kept in a glassed-in porch or greenhouse during the winter months. Both orchids do well outdoors in summer if they are in the cool, strong, filtered light of a shade tree or planted beside companion plants like begonias, aralias, ferns, and azaleas. Cymbidiums thrive best under 55% saran cloth and paphios under 70% saran cloth. During the summer, a light syringing of water will keep the plants cooler and retard evaporation of moisture from the leaves.

FLOWERS

Cymbidiums - Cymbidium flowers range in color of white, cream, buff, yellow, chartreuse, green and rose. The flowers grow on erect or arching spikes from December to June, depending on the varieties and produce a dozen or more 4½" - 5" flowers per stem. Most flowers last about one month and make excellent cut flowers. The major cause of cymbidiums not blooming is the lack of light. Let leaf color be your guide. The ideal leaf color is greenish-yellow. A dark green leaf color usually denotes too much shade. When the plants are in bud or flowers, additional shade will cut down on bud drop, improve flower color and to help the flowers last longer. Toward the end of May after the flowering season be sure and remove the shade so that your plants will start to get their summer's growth.

Paphios - Paphio flowers are usually one or two to a tall, erect stem. Many of them shine as if they had been lacquered. They may be yellow, white, green, green with white stripes, or a combination of background colors and markings in tan, maroon, green, white and mahogany brown. About 5" wide, the flowers last about three to six weeks indoors and make excellent cut flowers. Paphios can be forced into early Christmas blooms by exposing the plants to night temperatures in the low 50°F. in March and April.

WATERING

Both cymbidiums and paphios should never be allowed to dry out as this will stunt the new growth that would later produce flower spikes. Keep the soil moist but not soggy or the roots, and subsequently the plant, will die. Having a humidity tray beneath the orchids benefits them as well as a daily misting in the mornings. Excessive moisture on the leaves late in the day encourages disease. They should have good drainage so that the water can leach out the toxic elements left from a previous feeding. In the summer, water 2-3 times per week. Two of the main causes of leaf-tip die-back are insufficient water during the growing season and the build up of sodium salts in the potting mix. In the winter, water as necessary. Growth is at a minimum then, so plants may be kept drier but **never bone-dry**.

CONTINUED

POTTING

Cymbidiums and paphios can be grown in a potting mix of your own making. Such a potting mix contains 2 parts redwood bark or shavings, 2 parts perlite, 1 part sphagnum peat moss, 1 part sand and a little bit of bone meal or fertilizer. Ready-blended mixes are available wherever the medium, it should drain fast and be high in organic material. When selecting a pot, make sure it allows space for two new growths. Plastic pots are best because they hold in more moisture. If you use a plastic pot, plant about one half inch or so below the top of the compost. If the plant is set too deep, it will rot away.

DIVIDING

How and when do you divide your orchids?

Figure 1. The plant at the far left has just finished blooming. The pot is filled with bulbs and there is no more new growth. This is a good time to divide the plant and move it to a larger pot.

Figure 2. This shows how the division will be made. Plants have grown to a good specimen size remove them from the pot and wash all the old potting mix off the roots. Divide them in divisions of 4-5 healthy bulbs, as larger plants flower better. Take care not to use a sharp or pruning point to discourage rot. If the plants are not blooming, the best time to divide is in the fall. If blooming, May is best as soon as the flowers are cut. Do not divide after July 1 as that will prevent blooming the following year.

Figure 3. In planting, make a mound of mix in the center of the pot. Put the newly divided bulbs in and spread the roots over the mound. Pot the new divisions to the same depth with the potting mixture. Place the new divisions into a pot large enough to hold two new growths, but don't plant in an oversize pot. They thrive best when crowded. With cymbidiums, place the plant temporarily in a well shaded, moist location. Frequently mist or water the plant for **two weeks**. This dry period allows cuts or fractures to heal over. With paphios, place the plant immediately and resume normal care.



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 3

FEEDING

To promote growth and flowers, a well fed orchid is a happy orchid. Any powdered or liquid form of fertilizer that can be dissolved or diluted may be used. Apply it once a month or each time you water your orchids, the water may be substituted with the fertilizer. Be sure that all the soil is saturated as in watering. As with all chemicals, follow the directions.

PESTS

Cymbidiums and paphios are relatively free of pests. Aphids, mealybugs, and scale are the most common pests and can be controlled with malathion. Spider mites can be controlled with granular metaldehyde bait.

PAPHIOPEDILUM

